fifty (Rs. 3,250/-) for each pilgrim to Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam (KMVN) for arrangements made by KMVN for the Yatra. In additon, during the course of the Yatra, facilities provided by the Government to the pilgrims include free medical assistance, security and escort cover by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) till the Lipulekh Pass on the Indian side, communication links with China, and provision of satellite phone to the Liaison Officer for each batch of pilgrims for use during emergency throughout the Yatra. A Liaison Officer is attached by the Government with each batch of pilgrims, who is responsible for their general welfare.

(b) to (d) It is Government's endeavour to improve and upgrade facilities for the pilgrims going on the Yatra on a continuing basis. In this spirit, Government have, from time to time, also raised with the Chinese Government issues regarding the improvement of facilities on their side for the pilgrims. There has been progressive improvement over the years. In addition, Government have proposed to the Cinese side on several occasions in recent years opening of an alternative route of Kailash-Mansarovar through Demchok in Jammu and Kashmir, or Shipki La in Himachal Pradesh, which would be shorter and more convenient. The Chinese side has cited difficulty in opening these routes on the ground that it would involve travel over longer distances on their side through difficult terrain, with poor road conditions and lack of proper infrastructure for accommodation and communications.

(e) to (f) The issue of costing of the Yatra through the proposed alternative routes will arise only after an agreement could be reached with the Chinese side on these routes and specific arrangements put in place.

Indo-Pak talks on Siachen

2464. SHRIMATI JAYA BACHCHAN: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state the details of progress Government have made in talks with Pakistan over Kashmir in general and Siachen in particular during last six months?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): Jammu and Kashmir is one of the issues being discussed with Pakistan within the framework of the India-Pakistan Composite Dialogue. Two rounds of dialogue have been successfully concluded and the third round is scheduled to begin in January 2006. In

the course of these discussions and at various high level meetings, both sides have agreed to pursue measures to enhance interaction and cooperation across the LoC, including agreed meeting points for divided families, trade, pilgrimages and cultural interaction. The Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus service has been operationalised, though it is temporarily suspended due to the earthquake. Both countries have also agreed to let trucks use this route to promote trade. Agreement has also been reached to start additional routes, including the Poonch-Rawalakot bus service and to finalize modalities for meeting points for divided families across LoC. These issues will be taken up again once the infrastructure damaged by the earthquake is restored. Following the earthquake, both sides agreed to open five crossing points across LoC to facilitate the movement of people and relief material from either side.

Two rounds of talks have been held with Pakistan on the issue of Siachen and both sides have agreed to continue with their discussions to resolve the issue in a peaceful manner. India's consistent position on the Siachen issue is that authentication of the presently held positions has to be the first step before any redepoyment of troops is considered.

Joint control of India and Pakistan over Kashmir

†2465. SHRI KRIPAL PARMAR:
SHRI SURENDRA LATH:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) the extent to which Government have succeeded so far in resolving the Kashmir problem and the level at which discussions are being held with Pakistan by Government at present and the outcome thereof;

(b) whether the Government are also considering upon any option regarding joint control of India and Pakistan over Kashmir;

(c) if so, the concise details thereof; and

(d) the manner in which Government think the possibility of solving the problem appropriate by joint control keeping in view of the past attitude of Pakistan?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) India is committed under the Simla

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.